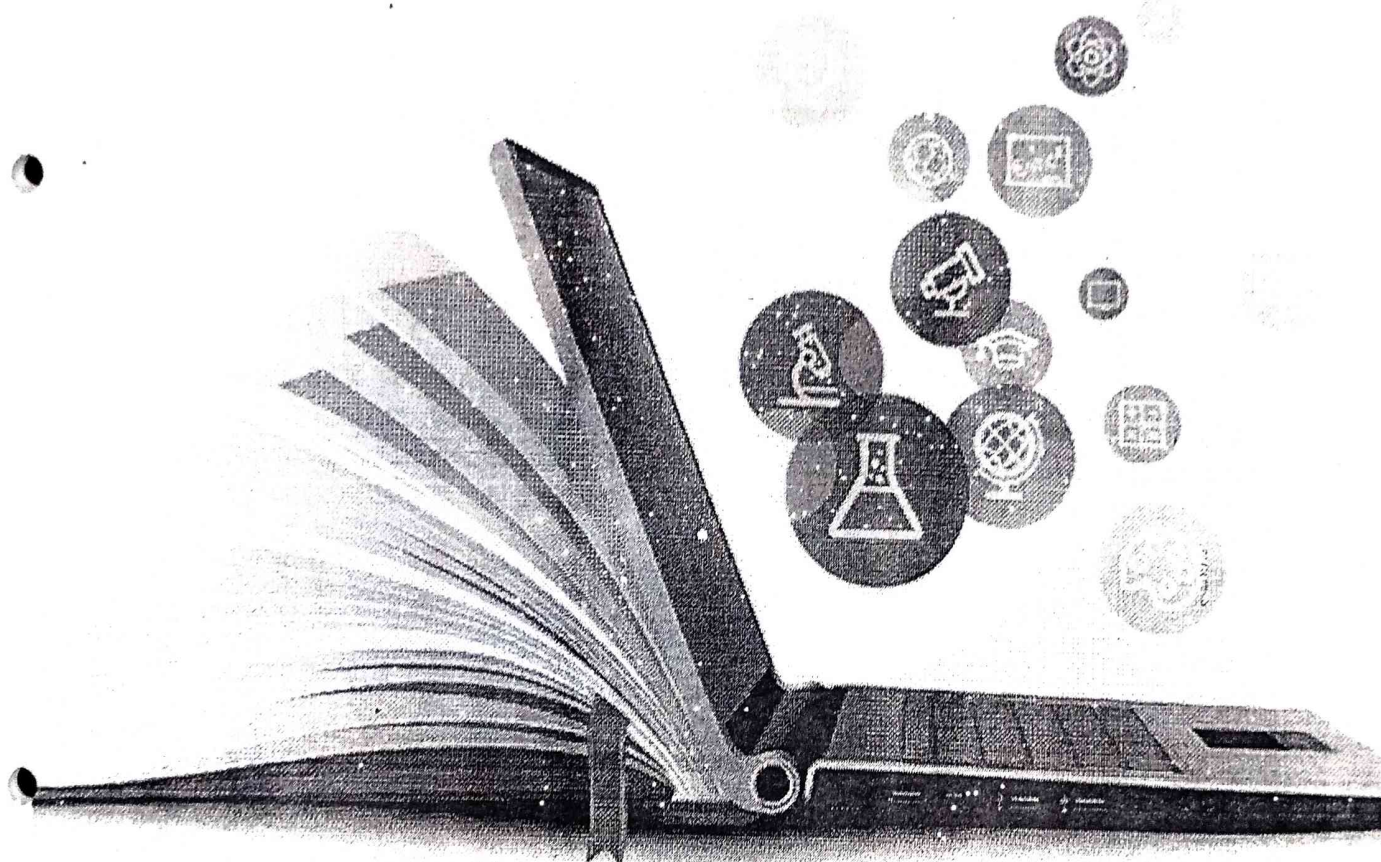


Online Education : Myths and Facts



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Impacts of Covid-19 on Education System in India

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I. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has also had a severe impact on higher education as universities closed their premises and countries shut their borders in response to lockdown measures. Although higher education institutions were quick to replace face-to-face lectures with online learning, these closures affected learning and examinations as well as the safety and legal status of international students in their host country. Perhaps most importantly, the crisis raises questions about the value offered by a university education which includes networking and social opportunities as well as educational content.

The pandemic posed several challenges in public and private schools which included an expected rise in dropouts, learning losses, and increase in digital divide. The pandemic also called into question the readiness of the systems, including teachers to address such a crisis and sustainability of private schools. However, COVID-19 also acted as a catalyst for digital adoption in school education. With schools reopening in many states, it is important that a careful strategy is built in to smoothen the transition of children back to school after more than 15 months of home-based learning. This transition has to consider the learning losses which had happened over the previous year as well take a futuristic approach to build a resilient system which can withstand any future shocks. To remain relevant, universities will need to reinvent their learning environments so that digitalization expands and complements student-teacher and other relationships. Reopening schools and universities will bring unquestionable benefits to students and the wider economy. In addition, reopening schools will bring economic benefits to families by enabling some parents to return to work. Those benefits, however, must be carefully weighed against the health risks and the requirement to mitigate the toll of the pandemic.

The need for such trade-offs calls for sustained and effective coordination between education and public health authorities at different levels of government, enhanced by local participation and autonomy, tailoring responses to the local context. Several steps can be taken to manage the risks and trade-offs, including physical distancing measures, establishing hygiene protocols, revising personnel and attendance policies, and investing in staff training on appropriate measures to cope with the virus.

Impact on Teachers and Students

Teachers and students are facing many hurdles during online education. At home, a lack of basic facilities, external distraction and family interruption during teaching were major issues noticed. Educational institution support barriers such as the budget for purchasing advanced technologies, a lack of training, a lack of technical support and a lack of clarity and direction were also noticed. Teachers also faced technical difficulties. The difficulties were grouped under a lack of technical support; it included a lack of technical infrastructure, limited awareness of online teaching platforms and security concerns. Teachers' personal problems including a lack of technical knowledge, course integration with technology are damper their engagement in online teaching.

Myths

1. **Employers don't value online degrees:** When online learning was brand new, employers might have felt wary especially in industries where a degree is a nonnegotiable qualification, such as education or healthcare. But for several years the popularity of online learning has been growing and what once seemed novel is downright common. There are some cases where an employer might even consider an online education more valuable.

The virtual classroom simulates many of the modern technologies used in the workplace. It's not uncommon for colleagues to communicate and collaborate online, so your online learning experience could prepare you for that interaction.

2. **Technology and the internet distract students:** The use of technology, such as laptops and phones distract students, and the internet cannot provide a classroom like an environment where students can learn without unnecessary interruptions. Students are tempted to pursue other digital activities during online lectures and they miss out on important topics. Social media, notification alerts, recommended YouTube videos, and other digital distractions shake up their concentration and divide their attention.

Fact: If a student can concentrate in a traditional classroom, there is nothing that can stop him to focus on online lectures. He needs the same amount of concentration and patience to learn online. Students can focus better in online classes because they are in a comfortable zone, not surrounded by their friends, and they know that they are there to study. The Internet makes the learning process fun and engaging.

3. **Virtual classrooms are a one-way street:** It is imagined that in online classes, the teacher switches on the camera and the microphone, gives a lecture, assigns homework and leaves. However, Prof. Dr Sugata Mitra has something else to suggest. According to his Self Organised Learning (SOL) theory, children with computer and internet access can actually learn better and quicker if given a chance and guided properly.

More importantly, if they're asked the right question. Certainly, this activity of asking a question is done by the teacher and finding the right or right adjacent answer is a task of students, so how can it be called a one-way street? This small example shows that not depending solely on the educator, online classes can be way more than just a lecture.

4. **Personal attention by educator towards their pupil is lost online:** Parents worrying about their child's personal attention time with their teacher is natural. If one notices a kid blankly staring at the screen without comprehending anything or not being able to pay attention to the classes, it's good to address those issues to the teacher immediately. To solve such matters, educators have begun to hold virtual parent-teacher meetings quite frequently these days. Honestly, these are the times to build trust amongst parents and the school the teacher has enough experience to analyze even in online class whether the lesson is comprehensible or not. The online curriculum is built on the basis of all the shortcomings and flaws of virtual presence and just transforming the same physical classroom syllabus onto the virtual one.
5. **Online courses offer no interaction with fellow students:** It's true that many students have found online courses to be more isolating than classrooms. However, this is often the result of the course design, rather than an inherent flaw in online education. Online collaborative projects, and group webinars are all positive ways fellow students can interact with each other during an online course. While it can be awkward for students to break the ice, with the right incentives many students find more confidence expressing themselves in writing than in words. This may make online education more comfortable way for introverts to bond with their classmates than traditional classrooms.
6. **The teachers who teach online are not subject experts:** They are unqualified and ineligible to teach in a real school or university and have therefore chosen to teach in virtual classrooms. Learners believe that students in traditional classrooms receive an inherently better education from real professors than online students.

Fact: There is no difference between an online instructor and a teacher in a traditional classroom. Online teachers can have in-depth subject knowledge and excellent communication skills.

There are always some guardians who believe that the teacher is taking a holiday and it is they who have to make their ward study. It is untrue! These teachers taught throughout their lives on a black/whiteboard, being physically present in front of their students and looking at their innocent faces to analyze what more needs to be done from the expressions. Now, they had to overnight turn to computer screens, start from scratch, learn how to start Zoom calls, and overwork in order to prepare for the long classes. All this so they could continue to teach their students. It is the time to support the teaching community, not doubt or question them unnecessarily.

II. Conclusion

India is not fully equipped to make education reach all corners of the nation via digital platforms. The students who aren't privileged like the others will suffer due to the present choice of digital platforms. The priority should be to utilize digital technology to create an advantageous position for millions of young students in India. It is need of the hour for the educational institutions to strengthen their knowledge and Information Technology infrastructure to be ready for facing COVID-19 like situations. Even if the COVID-19 crisis stretches longer, there is an urgent need to take efforts on maximum utilization of online platforms. In this sense, the pandemic is also a call to renew the commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals. Ensuring that all young people have the opportunity to succeed at school and develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will allow them to contribute to society is at the heart of the global agenda and education's promise to our future society. The current crisis has tested our ability to deal with large-scale disruptions. It is now up to us to build as its legacy a more resilient society.

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